

1235

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Playa Vieja

other name/site number: 12VPr2-70

2. Location

street & number: [REDACTED]

not for publication: x

city/town: Barrio Punta Arenas, Vieques

vicinity: _

state: PR county: Humacao

code: 069

zip code: 00765

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public-Federal

Category of Property: Site

Number of Resources within Property: 1

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ✓ nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ✓ meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

[Signature]
Signature of certifying official

7-13-92
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

please see attached letter dated 20 May 92
Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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5. National Park Service Certification

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I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ✓ entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the
 National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the
 National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain): _____

[Signature]
Signature of Keeper

9-10-92
Date
of Action

=====

6. Function or Use

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Historic: AGRICULTURE

Sub: _____

Current : AGRICULTURE
 MILITARY

Sub: _____

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:

N/A

Other Description: _____

Materials: foundation _____ roof _____
walls _____ other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Since 1942, when the Navy acquired it, the district has been uninhabited, and the old farmlands (clearly visible on aerial photographs taken in the mid-thirties) have been allowed to revert to a state of nature. Atop the terrace, the vegetation presently consists of thorn scrub interspersed with grasses. The bushes tend to grow in lines, so as to form a series of crisscrossing barriers that outline a number of little grassy areas. The former farmhouse (likewise visible on the photos taken in the mid-thirties) must have been razed sometime after 1942 by the Navy; nothing remains of it today but a low mound, surrounded by moderate amounts of refuse.

The historic farming community was not the first settlement to have been established in the Jardin district. In 1978, in the course of a Navy-sponsored archaeological survey of the NAF, a team headed by Marvin Keller, of Ecology & Environment, recovered a substantial amount of prehistoric refuse from the area around and below the spot on which the farmhouse had stood. The site from which that material was collected was subsequently registered as 12VPr2-70.

In 1980, another group of archaeologists, working under the supervision of Gary S. Vescelius, Linda S. Robinson, Carmine A. Tronolone and Glen Freimuth tested 12VPr2-70 for the purpose of ascertaining its eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Nineteen small excavations were made at the site, [REDACTED],

produced a total of 17,517 coarse-grade specimens (items large enough to have been caught on a screen with a 1/2-inch mesh). Those specimens included 2738 artifacts (2692 potsherds, 1 other ceramic object, 23 pieces of worked stone, 3 pieces of

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worked coral, 1 piece of worked bone, and 18 other items) and 15,139 ecofacts. Most of the latter, however, were rock particles which could be dismissed, after fairly careful scrutiny, as natural ingredients of the soil. There were only 225 ecofacts of cultural significance; 109 unmodified shell fragments, 64 pieces of unmodified bone and 52 fragments of unmodified coral. This is an exceptionally small amount of material; the density of shell at 12VPr2-70 is probably the lowest to have been noted anywhere on Vieques.

A great many smaller specimens were also recovered in the course of the work at 12VPr2-70. Few of them have actually been counted or analyzed, but the figures for just one of the 19 excavations (Pit 4) will serve to give some indication of their abundance. Taking into consideration only those items small enough to have passed through a screen with a 1/4" mesh but large enough to have been caught on one with an 1/8" mesh, Pit 4 produced 96 artifacts (a dozen microflakes and 84 tiny potsherds) and 80 fish bones (vs a grand total of 4 bones in the corresponding coarse-grade meaningful, inasmuch as 213 of the pieces appear to come from a single smashed whelk shell.) The bone statistics are important, however. They serve to spell out very clearly the fact that an analysis of coarse-grade materials alone is unlikely to yield a proper idea of the nature of ancient Viequense subsistence modes, or the character of the ancient Viequense diet; for the bone refuse consists almost entirely of tiny fragments too small to be caught on a 1/4" mesh.

With the exception of a handful of historic sherds, all of the pottery from the Playa Vieja site can be assigned to prehistoric times, and most of it is of a fairly late Saladoid (Longfordian) style. The rest can be characterized for the most part as epi-Saladoid (Richmondian), and is vaguely "Ostionoid" (without really deserving to be assigned to the Ostionoid series, in the sense in which that series was originally defined). A small amount of possibly younger pottery also occurs, but it is so uncommon as to rule out the possibility of any substantial late prehistoric occupation of the site. The Indian settlement at Playa Vieja seems to have been established, then, sometime around 600 or 700 AD, and to have endured surely been abandoned, and there is no evidence that it was ever reoccupied by Indians (except, perhaps, in a very transitory way), though the occurrence of a few European artifacts in the collections at hand attests to a recent reoccupation of a portion of the site--a reoccupation that is clearly reflected in aerial photographs taken in 1936 and 1937, on which it is possible to spot one large building standing on the site itself and five smaller structures strung out along the ravine, to the north of the point where it is crossed by the road.

Of all the sites discovered within the boundaries of the Naval Ammunition Facility, 12VPr2-70 has produced the strongest evidence of a stoneworking industry. In addition to the many small flakes and spalls occurring in both the coarse- and fine-grade samples from a number of different pits, various larger specimens likewise indicate on-site production and use of lithic artifacts. A crude quadrangular adz blank of unpolished metamorphic rock, edge-worn grindstones of varying abrasive quality, fragments of polished celts, and a finely smoothed discoidal bead testify to the existence of a well developed ground stone industry.

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Tiny denticulates, retouched flakes, a sizeable quartzite chopper, and numerous chips of chert, quartz and phaneritic rock are indicative, not merely of the use of flaked stone tools, but of their actual manufacture. The lithic assemblage from Playa Vieja has already been studied from a technological standpoint, with considerable care, by P.G.D. Tiscione (1980). We now need to ponder the questions of how the tools were used, and where the raw materials from which they were manufactured were obtained.

One notable peculiarity of the Playa Vieja site is the fact that though it has produced a wealth of implements manufactured from the shells of big marine gastropods of the genera *Strombus* and *Cassis*, it has failed to produce any *Strombus* or *Cassis* refuse--nothing that could be construed either as a piece of debitage or as food-waste. There is plenty of evidence of the use of shell tools, then, but no evidence of their having been manufactured on the site itself. The commonest shell implement is the ubiquitous celt; but the collection also includes several chisel-like objects made from sections knocked off the palatal lips of *Cassis* shells. Unfortunately, all of the objects in the collection are so heavily weathered that any manufacturing or use marks would have been completely obliterated.

In the course of the test-pitting undertaken at Playa Vieja in 1980 for the purpose of ascertaining the site's eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, a human burial was encountered. The skeleton was in very poor condition, and it was impossible to draw any firm conclusions as to the sex of the individual, or as to his or her age (other than to say that he or she was an adult). There were no grave goods, and interment was directly within a refuse heap, within a simple, unlined grave (the outlines of which were barely discernible). Nevertheless, a few interesting observations could be made. In the first place, the body had been tightly flexed, and lay on its left side, "facing" west. In the second place, all the bones of one foot (the left one) were missing, presumably as the result of intentional dismemberment. In most of the aforementioned features, this burial at 12VPr2-70 resembled another one, found shortly beforehand at a site (12VPr2-72) on Punta Carenero, in eastern Vieques, and dating from roughly the same time as the Playa Vieja find. The Carenero burial faced north rather than west, but it, too, was tightly flexed and it, too, lacked a foot; so we may be confronted with some hitherto unrecognized pattern of mutilation. In another respect, however, the Playa Vieja skeleton differed notably from the Carenero find: though the mandible was present, the cranium was lacking. Taken altogether, the implications of these data are that: (1) though the inhabitants of 12VPr2-70 were practicing primary burial (the body was partially dismembered prior to burial; (2) the parts of the body that were hacked off were (a) the left foot and (b) the head; (3:) the one foot and the cranium were buried with the rest of the body. Of course, it might be argued that the cranium deteriorated in situ, and that whatever fragments remained of it had been overlooked by the excavators, but that is extremely unlikely. The Playa Vieja burial has to be ranked, at this point, as a very perplexing enigma.

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8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: STATE, LOCAL

Applicable National Register Criteria: D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : _____

Areas of Significance: ARCHAEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC

Period(s) of Significance: PREHISTORIC

Significant Dates : _____

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: SALADOID, OSTIONOID, ELENOID, SPANISH COLONIAL

Architect/Builder: N/A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Playa Vieja site is (1) the largest, richest and best preserved aboriginal dwelling site _____

_____ (3) a potential type site for an as yet undefined (but definable) late Saladoid (Longfordian) stage of the local cultural sequence, (4) the source of what is, by local standards, an unusual number of comparatively fine flaked stone artifacts, and (5) the best surviving representative of a particular adaptive mode--of the exploitation of what might be called a "littoral piedmont" niche. Some of the deposits at Playa Vieja have been demonstrated to be relatively deep and well stratified. One human skeleton has already been found on the site, and it is to be expected that additional burials are awaiting discovery. Though no structural remains have been encountered to date, it is by no means inconceivable that such features exist.

With the possible exception of the Ventana sites (12VPr2-5+61+135), which have also been judged to be worthy of nomination for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, 12VPr2-70 is the most important prehistoric site ever to have been recorded anywhere within the boundaries of the Naval Ammunition Facility, and a place of key importance to any archaeologist attempting to unravel the prehistory of Vieques.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Vescelius, Gary S., & Linda S. Robinson. The Prehistoric Settlement Pattern on the Southwest Coast of Vieques. Reports of the Archaeological Survey of Vieques, Series B, Number 19. Charlotte Amalie: Archaeological Services, 1980.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____


Primary Location of Additional Data:

- ☐ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: 

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing



Verbal Boundary Description:



**This is a correct figure and remains unchanged from the original.

Boundary Justification:

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11. FORM PREPARED BY:

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Name/Title: Linda S. Robinson & Gary S. Vescelius
(Archaeologist) (Archaeologist)

Organization: Archaeological Services & Ecology and Environment

Street & Number: P.O. Box 7818 P.O. Box D

City/Town: Charlotte Amalie, VI 00801 Buffalo, NY 14225

Date: 5 July 1980 Telephone: (809)774-3575 & (716)632-4491

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Form Re-submitted By:

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Name/Title: Dr. John B. Murphy/Cultural Resources Manager

Organization: Naval Facilities Engineering Command Date: 23 January 1992

Street & Number: 200 Stovall Street Telephone: (703) 325-7353

City or Town: Alexandria State: VA ZIP: 22332-2300

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 92001235

Date Listed: 9-10-92

Property Name

County

State

Playa Vieja

Vieques

PR

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Janet E. Townsend
Signature of the Keeper

9-10-92
Date of Action

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Amended Items in Nomination:

The county location is incorrect, the period of significance is unclear, and no historic function is indicated. The nomination is amended as follows: The county is Vieques. The period of significance is A.D. 600 - 1000. The historic function is "camp."

Mr. J. Bernard Murphy, the Navy FPO, was contacted regarding these amendments.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)